

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee and the subcommittee on Education,

My name is Maria Camila Bortolletto and I currently live in Brookfield, CT. I am here to speak on the Governor's proposed Budget for Elementary & Secondary Education (HB6659). I am here today to ask the Appropriations Committee both to increase funding for Danbury Public Schools and to not support funding for the new proposed charter school in Danbury.

I am an alumni of Danbury Public Schools, having attended elementary, middle, and high school in the Danbury school system. I am also the Co-Executive Director of CT Students for a Dream (C4D), which is a statewide, youth-led network that fights for the rights of undocumented immigrant youth and their families. Today I am speaking from my personal perspective as a former student in Danbury Public Schools, and as someone who works with immigrant students in Danbury as part of my work with CT Students for a Dream.

Danbury Public Schools are severely underfunded. I see that now in my work with youth in Danbury, and I saw it when I was a student myself. Danbury has one of the lowest per pupil school expenditure at \$13,521¹. Neither the city of Danbury nor the state of Connecticut have met their financial obligations to the Danbury Public School System. Danbury Public Schools have not had a fully-funded municipal budget in nearly 20 years. The state's ECS formula has not been fully funded either. This underfunding has been compounded over decades and fixing it won't be overnight.

We can see the consequences of this under funding everyday in the Danbury schools. When I was a student at Danbury High School, class of 2006, DHS was overcrowded. I talk to students today and they still say the same thing. DHS students I work with also tell me of broken bathrooms, broken water fountains, lack of supplies, old textbooks, and other issues I am sure better funded districts don't deal with.

I loved attending Danbury schools, the diversity in languages and cultures of the student body, the teachers, and the community was amazing. We deserved more, the students I work with today deserve more. The solution to these issues is more funding for the Public School System and its current schools. Its unacceptable that Danbury has one of the lowest per pupil funding in the state. What the state can do this year, is it can make steps towards fully funding the ECS formula.

Funding another model, a new charter school, that will serve only a fraction (less than 6%) of our students is not the answer to the chronic underfunding of Danbury Public Schools and it does not make fiscal sense. It doesn't benefit most of the students that the school system serves. A charter school in Danbury will contribute to the underlying funding problem in Danbury Public Schools by drawing more funds away from the public school system. It would take much-needed money away from the our current schools in the following ways:

¹ https://edsight.ct.gov/Output/District/HighSchool/0340011_201920.pdf

- Additional transportation costs of at least \$600,000 for 2 buses to transport an initial class of 110 students. To put it in perspective, this is the cost of hiring 3-4 much needed school counselors at the middle and high school level.
- Special education costs - either diverting current staff to the charter school, or hiring special educators for the charter school. Either way, it results in a significant additional cost to the school district in order to serve the same number of students it is serving now.
- DPS will also lose the state funding for any students who enroll in the charter school, but the loss of those students will not result in a net-positive for the district in terms of space or funding. In other words, because students will come from across the district's schools, the shift in students will have no measurable positive impact on the current staffing and space needs of the rest of the district. Rather, it will only exacerbate the space and staffing issues by diverting much needed funds from the existing schools.

As an alumni of Danbury Public Schools I urge you to take steps to fully fund Danbury Public Schools and to consider the impact to the current schools and our students if financial support is provided to a facility that will compete with it for funding. If you want to put more education dollars into Danbury, please do it by providing funding to the current public schools and the whole system as part of a long term solution as face an increasing student population.

Thank you,

Camila Bortolletto
Brookfield, CT